



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Phone: (703) 351-7676

STAT

2 August 1985

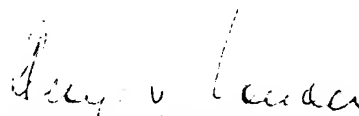
Mr. James M. Ragsdale
Editor
NEW BEDFORD STANDARD-TIMES
555 Pleasant Street
New Bedford, Massachusetts 02742

Dear Mr. Ragsdale:

We recently received a copy of your 13 July 1985 editorial which made a number of incorrect assumptions about CIA's complaint to the Federal Communications Commission. Had you taken the time to look into the subject, you would have known that our complaint had nothing to do with our "like" or "dislike" for the program. We objected to ABC's broadcasting an almost totally false story that accused the CIA of committing illegalities and improprieties and after our protest retracting only one of the many falsehoods. The complaint makes clear that we were asking for an investigation and retraction of all the charges, not for "punishment" of ABC.

I am enclosing for your information a copy of the petition for reconsideration that CIA filed with the FCC last February and a copy of our public statement on the petition. The CIA takes seriously charges that it acts counter to the laws established to govern it and whenever possible--particularly in such outrageous circumstances as the ABC broadcast--tries to respond publicly to them. One wonders why you are so ready to believe that CIA is engaged in a "petty vendetta" rather than to question how ABC could broadcast a story that had been declared false not only by the CIA but by other journalists and then refuse to correct the untruths.

Sincerely,


George V. Lauder
Director, Public Affairs

pic

NEW BEDFORD STANDARD-TIMES (MA)
13 July 1985

FCC doesn't promote CIA reprisal, but threat still looms

The Central Intelligence Agency was sent packing Friday by the Federal Communications Commission, leaving the CIA scrounging around its headquarters for another way to get retribution against the ABC television network for a program the CIA didn't like.

Speculation is that the CIA will take a crack at the U.S. Supreme Court, in an attempt to teach ABC some manners when it comes to news coverage of the intelligence agency. Only time will tell if this institutional petulance will pay off in some way, but for now this tactic of government reprisal for bad publicity hasn't paid off.

The scenario is this: ABC last September aired a report that the CIA plotted to murder Ronald Rewald, who is defending himself against fraud charges by saying his company was a CIA front. ABC backed away from the story later, but the CIA was stung, and wanted ABC to get its comeuppance.

So, for the first time, the FCC had before it the case of another government agency that wanted a broadcast organization punished for its behavior. Court action, presumably, was too messy, time-consuming and unpredictable for the CIA, and, besides,

who could imagine a court finding that the CIA had actually been damaged by the report?

The CIA apparently decided that the fastest way to get back at ABC was through federal licensing authorities, who perhaps could punish the network for violating its much-disputed "fairness doctrine."

The FCC's ruling Friday in ABC's favor offers a breathing spell. But since the FCC also ruled that government agencies like the CIA can still file complaints, a cloud hangs over the future of network news coverage.

Imagine, for instance, the Nixon White House asking the FCC to pull the licenses of TV stations that carried early stories about Watergate. If every government agency that had bad news written about it were to cry on the shoulder of a sympathetic FCC, the shock waves would cripple broadcast news coverage of the government — all without resorting to the courts for redress.

In the interests of an open public debate and free flow of information, the CIA and other government agencies should stick to their business and forgo their petty vendettas and attempts at short-cut reprisals.